Seizure 2002; **11**: 70
doi:10.1053/seiz.2001.0634, available online at http://www.idealibrary.com on IDEAL®

BOOK REVIEW

Limbic Seizures in Children. Ist Edition, Edited by G. Avanzini, A. Beaumanoir and L. Mira. Eastleigh: John Libbey & Co Ltd, 2001. 258 pp. ISBN: 0861965957

This book is one of the recent volumes in the Mariani Foundation paediatric neurology series. The aim of the colloquium from which this multi-author book arises was to outline the current state of knowledge regarding the expression of paediatric epilepsies involving the limbic structures with a view to defining a limbic epilepsy. The book begins with an interesting description of the history of limbic seizures since Jackson's 1888 description of 'intellectual aura' and 'dreamy state', and takes the reader through the evolution of the various terminologies employed to describe limbic seizures. The various definitions proposed reflect the controversies surrounding the pathophysiology, natural history and diagnostic criteria which are still unresolved. A short section on limbic system anatomy and functional organization, despite reminding me of undergraduate neuroanatomy, was easier to digest than expected and induced only mild panic.

To reach a consensus for a definition of limbic epilepsy, which may enable a better understanding of the pathohysiology and particularly the processes which act on the developing brain, a large part of this book is devoted to various features of limbic seizures. This includes chapters concerning impairment of consciousness, language and speech disturbances, neuro-vegetative, postural, psychic and perceptual manifestations and motor automatisms. The issue of the preferential propagation pathways of limbic discharges is addressed from both an experimental and clinical perspective. There are also chapters highlighting differences between 'temporal' and 'frontal' seizures, the aetiological role (or not) of febrile convulsions (FC), EEG features of limbic seizures and several chapters devoted to neuroimaging and treatment, all of which were interesting. The suggestion that FC may not themselves be an aetiological factor in mesial temporal lobe epilepsy but that pre-existing, genetically determined hippocampal cell loss and structural abnormalities may predispose a child to both FC and the development of mesial temporal sclerosis is an interesting hypothesis examined in one chapter. The overall message from all these chapters stresses the limited localizing value of individual signs and symptoms occurring during seizures involving limbic structures if they are considered in isolation. The need to reconstruct the origin of seizure discharges, through chronological analysis of ictal electroclinical phenomenology and available anatomical information is stressed, although the difficulties sometimes accomplishing this in young children is acknowledged.

Reaching a consensus on the diagnostic criteria for limbic epilepsy will not be an easy task. However, a consensus diagnosis may provide prognostic insights which could assist in the development of strategies for preventing the unfavourable evolution often observed in these disorders. I found this an immensely interesting book which will be of benefit to all those working with and treating children with limbic seizures.

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